

CAPC Chair Barb Finch discusses child abuse prevention on “Community Focus”, broadcast to the stations of American General Media Santa Maria (including 95.7 The Beat and 104.1 Pirate Radio) in May 2010.

Kurt: Welcome to “Community Focus”, heard every Saturday and Sunday morning at this time on the stations of American General Media Santa Maria. And, this morning we’re talking with Barbara Finch, chair of the Santa Barbara County Child Abuse Prevention Council. Good morning, Barbara.

Barb: Good morning.

Kurt: Great to have you here, and I just want to say thank you for all that you and everybody from your organization does on behalf of children and people here on the Central Coast. I thank you for that, as do many in the community. I wanted to ask you this morning, you are the Chair of the Santa Barbara County Child Abuse Prevention Council. Can you explain that a little more?

Barb: Our Child Abuse Prevention Council is actually a collective of different agencies, and members from different agencies around the county that are all working with families, and we come together to really develop some strategies for how we can best do prevention in Santa Barbara. And so, I don’t do all the work; I help run the meetings but there’s a lot of people out there just really advocating and doing the work with families that make kids safer in our community.

Kurt: What can people do to prevent child abuse and neglect?

Barb: Well, first of all, just recognizing that it is a problem and it does exist in our community, and that really it’s a shared responsibility. So, the best, most simple answer to that question is just to support families, to support parents, help people take care of themselves and help, you know, help support each other in our neighborhoods and in our community. You know, a lot of child abuse and neglect happens because parents are stressed out. And so, anything you can do to provide that support is really going to be helpful in terms of prevention.

Kurt: Have the cases of child abuse gone up within the last few years? Does child abuse go up when the economy goes bad?

Barb: Generally, yes, the numbers do go up when the economy goes bad. There’s more stressors, and so that’s usually how the rates go. Neglect has gone up over the years compared to other types of abuses that we see, but the rate of child abuse and neglect has actually gone down from a high that we experienced in 2006 and 2007 in Santa Barbara County. The overall trend has been increasing over the last ten years or so. But, you know, there’s both a mix of good news and bad news there.

Kurt: Sure. And, obviously, it's something unfortunately that never goes away. It rears its ugly head; year after year there are different cases. You don't hear about child abuse and neglect very much. People seem to just forget about it.

Barb: Right. Unfortunately when we do hear about child abuse and neglect, it's the really extreme cases. And there's a lot that happens under the radar where families are just really struggling and kids are in danger, and we don't hear about it on the news. And that's why we really feel it's so important to get the message out, that it is preventable in a lot of situations, because we just need to help families learn about their children and learn about child development, so that they can really respond in ways that are healthy and helpful for their kids' development.

Kurt: What is the first step that someone would take? What works for prevention? What can parents and community members do?

Barb: Well, as far as parents, the first thing is just take care of yourself so that you can take care of your children. Learn about your child's developmental stages, learn what's appropriate for each age, and talk to other parents. Because a lot of times if you're struggling with something, somebody else has struggled with the same thing and they may be able to give you some really good advice. In terms of the community, there's so many places that come into contact with families. Churches and schools and service groups and medical offices; you know, there's a lot of people that come into contact with families. So the first thing is just to recognize when a family is struggling and offer some assistance. Help them get connected to resources in the community, whether it's counseling, or a food bank – or, you know, whatever the issue is, there's a lot out there that can really help families deal with those stressors so that they're not taking it out on the kids.

Kurt: And this, obviously, probably is something that a parent does not want to talk about sometimes with their friend. If there is a problem in their home, they don't know who to go to; they need somebody they can talk to to begin the cycle of healing.

Barb: Right, well, oftentimes we don't know the depths of the problem, but there are –

Kurt: Sure.

Barb: – signs that the family's struggling. So if they're talking to you about you know, just having trouble with their kids' behavior, or if they're having trouble paying the bills, I mean, those are the access points where we can begin to help the family. And then through that, find that, you know, if there's a need to refer to counseling or to some other type of service so that they can really work on the abuse issue, those come to light usually at a later point.

Kurt: Can you tell me this, Barbara – how can the average Mr. and Mrs. Smith, how can they support your efforts through donations and/or partnering with the Santa Barbara County Child Abuse Prevention Council?

Barb: Well, one of the great things is just to know where the resources are, so that you can, you know, help people get connected. Our website is PreventChildAbuseSB.org, and it's got a list of local community agencies and, you know, tips for parents, and that kind of thing. Also the 211 network is a way to get people the help that they need. And through our website, they can make donations to the Children's Trust Fund, which helps support all of the work that the Child Abuse Prevention Council is doing.

Kurt: Excellent. Tell me this, do you have any fundraisers going on this spring or summer that you'd like to mention?

Barb: We don't have any fundraisers planned as of yet. This is, April is Child Abuse Prevention Month, so we've been focusing on the awareness campaign. We do meet as a Council every month, and if people would like to be more involved with the work that's going on, they can get the information about our meetings from our website.

Kurt: Okay. Are you looking for any volunteers?

Barb: We can always use volunteers. And mostly, you know, the way to get involved is to come to the meetings and find out what the work is doing, and then figure out where you'll best fit.

Kurt: And how often do you have the meetings?

Barb: They are the third Thursday of every month.

Kurt: Third Thursday of every month, if somebody would like to volunteer for the Santa Barbara County Child Abuse Prevention Council. And where are the meetings held the third Thursday?

Barb: They are held at the Santa Inez Mission, in Solvang. And again, you can contact either myself or Katharina Zulliger, who is the KIDS Network Coordinator, for more information about the meetings.

Kurt: Phone number?

Barb: Phone number for Katharina is 346-8222.

Kurt: Okay. And I also want to ask you, in some cases of child abuse, in a child's life, they have to get counseling, treatment, therapy, and if they don't, then when they are in their twenties, thirties, forties, fifties, there could be a big dysfunction in their life, in their own marriage, in their own adulthood. If and when you come across cases where a child has been abused, can you refer a child to somebody who can get them therapy? What if a child is from a family that can't afford any kind of therapy? Do you guys network this child with some organization here on the Central Coast where the child can talk to somebody, get the counseling, get the therapy?

Barb: Right, absolutely. You know, when there's a case of substantiated abuse, Child Welfare Services is the agency that evaluates what type of intervention is appropriate. And sometimes they will open a case, if it seems like it's severe, they will be directing the intervention and treatment for that family, and make sure that the children are getting the services that they need. In some cases, the level of danger is not quite that high, in which case it's more the community agencies that take the referrals and offer services to the family and really help them get what they need. Not just the child, but also the parents, because, you know, children want to be with their parents. Parents want to keep their children, for the most part. And so, making sure that everybody has what they need to make it a safe situation for the child, whether it's substance abuse treatment programs, or mental health services, or you know, help with economic stressors, you know, there's lots that can be done for those children who aren't quite crossing over into the zone where they need to be removed from their families, but there's still something that needs to be done to help that be a safe situation.

Kurt: I understand. Tell me this, addiction and child abuse. Do they kind of run together?

Barb: Yes, absolutely. That's one of the primary factors for child abuse and neglect in our county. It's, you know, the rise in methamphetamine use, and substance abuse in general, is oftentimes a factor.

Kurt: Do you feel that if there were more places where someone could be treated for their addiction and not be incarcerated, but somehow get treatment, if it was out there, if it was just more prevalent, if it was as easy to get as a pack of gum at the corner fast food store – do you think that child abuse would go down, if more people could get treatment for their addictions?

Barb: You know, it's hard to say. People need to want recovery, and that's what we know about addiction, is that, you know, people have to want that kind of help. But, yeah, I mean, especially where children are involved. If the different points where people are, like the law enforcement and Child Welfare Services, and the people who are offering the support services – if we're all talking to one another so that we can get the families help as soon as possible, the chances for success are much greater. But it needs to be a comprehensive approach. You know, the children need to be taken into consideration by the substance abuse treatment program. You know, and so it just, it takes a little bit of finesse to make it work moving forward, and, you know, cooperation and collaboration on the part of the different agencies that are involved.

Kurt: Sure. Takes a lot of work through time.

Barb: Right, right. But the key is the services have to be out there, so that people know where to access them, and they know, they have the encouragement and the feeling like it's okay to ask for help.

Kurt: Yeah, very important. And obviously, the Santa Barbara County Child Abuse Prevention Council is one of the important services. Is there anything else you'd like to add before we finish up here this morning?

Barb: Just that, you know, child abuse and neglect is preventable, and if we all as a community help out in whatever way we can, to make sure that parents and children have a strong bond, and that we're providing the opportunities for education and learning, and, you know, places where kids can be safe – I mean, that's going to be the best way to help our families and to help our communities stay strong.

Kurt: Most definitely, and it all starts within one block of a community and then spreads to another block, and then the community improves and the county improves, and the state gets better and the world could be a better place.

Barb: And then we don't have all those, we don't have all those social problems that are so hard to fix, when families go bad and kids end up in trouble, and you know, I mean, it just, there's so many problems in our community that would be better off if we just took care of our children.

Kurt: Oh, that is so true. Barbara Finch, one more time, what is your website where people can get more information and/or make a donation?

Barb: The website is PreventChildAbuseSB.org.

Kurt: Okay, and a number for the phone number for the Santa Barbara County Child Abuse Prevention Council, if somebody would like more information? Or, is there a number, if somebody knows of a situation of child abuse, maybe in their neighborhood, witnesses it? What should they do?

Barb: If they witness child abuse, they should call the Child Abuse Hotline, and the number of the Child Abuse Hotline is 800-367-0166.

Kurt: And the number for more information at your office is?

Barb: More information is 805-346-8222.

Kurt: Okay. Barbara Finch, Chair of the Santa Barbara County Child Abuse Prevention Council, thank you so much for taking time out this morning and talking with us. And again, we appreciate the work you and your organization do here on the Central Coast. Please, keep it up.

Barb: Thank you, Kurt. I appreciate the opportunity to talk with the community.